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NAZI IDEOLOGY REDEFINING DEVIANTS: WITCHES, HIMMLER'S WITCH-TRIAL SURVEY, AND THE CASE OF THE BISHOPRIC OF BAMBERG

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Nazi ideology redefined the witches persecuted during the 16th and 17th centuries as followers of Celto-Germanic Nature Religion. SS-Reichsfuhrer Himmler formed a *Hexen-Sonderkommando* to carry out an archival survey of witch trials, resulting in the *Kartoteka*, a file system comprising over 30,000 cases. This paper examines the ideological background, the structure and method of survey, the quality of the file by going back to original sources in the bishopric of Bamberg, and provides a statistical summary.

Ideology and Redefinition

According to the theological definition of the Inquisition, and of Christianity generally, the Great Conspiracy of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to topple Christian Civilization consisted of the witches, an heretical movement guided by Satan, out to wreak harm to the human community, and therefore presumable warranting the Great Persecution, whose victims have been numbered into the millions.

The German National Socialist ideologues of the Third Reich had a different interpretation of who the witches really were. SS-Reichsfuhrer Heinrich Himmler accepted the theory that the witches were remnant groups still adhering to pre-Christian Celto-Germanic Nature Religion. This theory was not original with Himmler or the Nazis in general, but most likely derived from two influential authors. Jacob Grimm who in his volumes of *Deutsche Mythologie*(original 1835) hinted at a relationship between ancient Germanic religious ideas and the witch persecution not only culturally, but even socially, i.e., in ongoing organizations of worshipers. Another writer, far more

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persuasive, was Margaret Murray, a British anthropologist, who published a series of books in the 1920s, notably *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921), in which she claimed to have discovered evidence showing that Medieval Renaissance witches were direct descendants of the ancient Celts who had continued practicing pagan religion. According to Murray, the Inquisition actually battled a continuing religious community that had its roots in pre-Christian religion.

This is not the place to critique Murray's theory. It has been done elsewhere (Cohn, 1975:107-120; Mair, 1969:266ff.; Thomas, 1971: 514-517; Sebald, 1978: 160-164). Suffice it to say here that outside of a relatively small, yet vocal, group of followers (e.g., Hughes, 1952; Summers, 1970; Haining, 1977), reputable historians question the validity of the theory and find its founder's "evidence" most spurious.

Nonetheless, the theory has made a profound impact on a group of British, notably on author Gerald Gardner (1951), and contributed to, if not caused, the formation of a neo-pagan movement in England (see inside view by Holzer, 1969)--spilling over onto the United States, where it is currently spreading as Wicca covens (cf. Russell; Sebald; Truzzi).

Evidently Himmler accepted the essence of Murray's and Grimm's theory as reliable anthropology. Doubtless, his sympathy rested with the persecuted witches, who, in his eyes were Celto-Germanic Aryans practicing superior Nature religion and suffering merciless persecution under an inferior religion, Christianity, which, in his view, was afflicted, in addition to other inherent decadent features, by Semitic origin. His Weltanschauung formulated a clear meaning of what took place during the 16th and 17th centuries: An epic battle between the descendants of Aryans adhering to noble Nature religion and the representatives of decadent Judeo-Christian tradition trying to exterminate by accusation of heresy and maleficia.

Himmler's "Hexen-Sonderkommando" and the "Kartoteka"

Himmler's interest in the Inquisition and related issues was notorious and relatively well known. For example, with a flair for the dramatic, he once advocated the public execution of the Pope (Herzstein, 1980: 84). At the same time, he was fascinated by the dynamic efficiency of the Jesuit order and patterned certain aspects of the SS organization after it. Hitler once called him: "Our own Ignatius Loyola" (Herzstein, 1989:84).

What was not well known was Himmler's specific interest in the witch persecution of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance--an interest so intense that it led him to set up a *Hexen-Sonderkommando*, a special team to collect a file system about the witch trails of that era. The discovery of the file, and hence the knowledge about this mission, came as a surprise in the early 1980s. The German historian Gerhard Schormann from the University of Dusseldorf, one of the first scholars to study the files, reported that while we have no direct statement by Himmler himself clearly elucidating the motive for organizing the enterprise, a member of his *Sonderkommando* described the dual purpose of the survey: (1) to identify remnants of ancient Germanic beliefs

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and (2) to utilize the information gained about the witch trials in anti-Christian propaganda, specifically directed against the Roman Catholic Church (Schormann, 1981:8-10). The extent, if any, to which the survey's findings were actually used or usurped by Himmler -- or by propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, who would have been the more pertinent agent to promulgate them -- is not known at this time. This question deserves separate research. Most likely, however, the survey came too late onto the national theater to be of any use to the Nazi ideologues, and this misguided effort sank with the rest of their illusions.

The work of the *Sonderkommando* did not proceed without bureaucratic difficulties. A squabble ensued between Himmler's *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, (National Security Center), and *Ahnenerbe* (Institute for Issues of Racial Purity and Descendancy). The latter office felt that the search and survey concerning witches should be a part of its metier. It required an autocratic order by Himmler in 1938 to settle the matter, and the survey team stayed with the National Security Center (Schormann, 1981:8).

Neither the identities nor the job qualifications are known for all team members. Schormann (1981:9) discovered references to eight of them, some known only by initials or name abbreviations marked on the individual survey forms))each form consisting of a short questionnaire covering one trial (see Figure 1). They were Dr. Rudolf Levin (!), Dr. Ernst Merkel, Rudolf Richter, Schmidt, Bie, Rm, W, and We. My examination of a part of the file system resulted in the discovery of three additional coworkers, who signeted WZ, BG, and Bi. Hence it appears that there were at least 11 field workers. Schormann found personal information for only two of them (1981: 9-10): Dr. Levin, born 1909, studied humanities (specifically history, German, English, and philosophy) at the University of Leipzig, wrote a dissertation, "Der Geschichtsbegriff des Positivismus unter besonderer Berucksichtigung Mills und den rechtsphilosophischen Anschauungen John Austins," and received a Ph.D. in 1935. His career included promotion to *Obersturmbannfuhrer* in the SS and appointment to director of the witch-survey *Sonderkommando*. Dr. Merkel was born 1907 in Strassburg and studied at the University of Giessen in Hesse, where in 1939 he completed a doctoral dissertation, "The Devil in Hessian Witch Trials," dealing with the relationship between vestiges of ancient Germanic beliefs and the witch mania of Christianity. His dissertation seems to have grown out of his work with the *Sonderkommando* (giving testimony to the universality of work-study programs) and represents objective scholarship, despite the political context.

It was possible to identify a third fieldworker, whose signet had been Rm, and who turned out to be Paul Reissmann, an instructor (*Studienreferendar*) in historical studies at the University of Leipzig. Together with another team member, identified merely as We, Reissman had completed a survey questionnaire on the 7th of January 1936 in the *Staatsarchiv* of Nuremberg. An examination of the *Korrespondenz-Akten* of the institute shed light upon the bureaucratic process whereby the commando achieved access to the various archives. The correspondence file of the Nuremberg archive disclosed that on June 21, 1936 the *Hauptstaatsarchiv* (Main State Archive) in Munich ordered the various state archives to prepare indexes of all available documents

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dealing with witch trials and send them without delay to the Main State Archive in Munich (*Korrespondenz-Atken 1936*, State Archive Nuremberg). Transalted the letter said:

> For the scientific use, in which a very high-ranking personage is greatly interested, it is imperative to assess the extend to which Bavarian archives have documents dealing with witch trials. I request that an index of pertinent documents is to be sent in duplicate with most possible expedience. Included in the index should be documents that may already have been used in scientific evaluations.
>
> D. Knopfler
> Director General of Government
> Archives of Bavaria

It is noteworthy that Reissmann had visited the Nuremberg archives six months prior to the first directive issued by Munich. This suggests that he had made a preliminary assessment of the state of organization and availability of trial documents. Evidently he and his co-worker had concluded from their initial check of the material that intramural indexing of pertinent material would expedite the commando's work. It is also noteworthy that Nuremberg responded with utmost speed: The directive was dated Munich, June 21st, the "received" stamp in Nuremberg reads June 25th, and the Munich main office later confirmed receipt of the index on June 27th. If the material was indeed organized into an index as a result of the request, it would mean that the Nuremberg archivists literally set to work immediately and completed the job within a day (and night?). Most likely, of course, some sort of index had already been on file.

Approximately 18 months later, on January 31st, 1938, another directive was sent by the Main State Archive to the subordinate institute in Nuremberg. This letter, unlike the first, was not a general directive addressed to all archival institutions under the Main Archive's jurisdiction, but was specifically directed at the *Staatsarchive* Nuremberg (*Korrespondenz Akten 1938*, State Archive Nuremberg):

> Within a few weeks you will be paid a visit by *Studienreferendar* [instructor/lecturer] Paul Reissmann from the Seminar for Historical Sciences at the University of Leipzig in order to evaluate the documents listed in the index which you submitted to this office on June 27th, 1936.
>
> I request that you provide Mr. Reissmann with the pertinent documents and, should he wish so, also with older lists or any other archival material, and in general extend any assistance, including recommending him to other scientific institutions in your community.
>
> Mr. Reissmann, a strictly scientific researcher, has also worked at the Main State Archive and I greatly emphasize that it is important that you facilitate his scientific work at your archives as much as possible.
>
> D. Knopfler
> Director General of Government
> Archives of Bavaria

A pattern emerges from these findings, suggesting the structure of the *Sonderkommando's* work:

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(1) Preliminary checks of various state archives were made. Possibly a number of easily available trial records were studied and pertinent information extracted and recorded on the one-page questionnaires.

(2) Depending on the state of the given archive's organization and on the extent to which the initial examination resulted in completions of the questionnaires, the Main State Archive's director issued an order and requested an inventory of the pertinent material.

(3) After receipt of the inventory and depending on the work schedule of the commando, the director of the Main State Archive would announce the visit of the surveyers.

(4) The surveyers had unlimited access to archival material as well as unlimited time to visit and revisit the archives. In the case of Reissmann, his signet appeared for the first time on a questionnaire (referring to Nuremberg and Bamberg material) completed in 1936; then again in 1938, and then continuously through 1942, with the most frequent recurrences during 1939.

The team's work lasted approximately nine years, starting in the mid '30s and ending in 1944, with most cases collected in 1939/40. Schormann's analysis found that 154 different archives and libraries had been included in the search for pertinent historical documents. No doubt, the project was ambitious, the work involved prodigious, the outcome comprehensive -- but incomplete. Schormann, for example, found gaps after he independently studied trial records in the archives of the archdiocese of Cologne (1981:13). Nonetheless, the team collected approximately 30,000 cases, ordered into 3,621 territorial files.

The one-page questionnaire completed for each case contained 57 questions which can be broken down into 9 groups: (1) Personal background (questions 1-15); (2) family conditions (including a question about "race") (16-22); (3) procedural aspects from arrest to the carrying out of the sentence (23-30); (4) file cross-references (32); (5) name or initials of SS surveyers and date of completion of questionnaire (33-34); (6) jurisdictional authority in the case (35-43); (7) appraisal by bishop and the holy order (44-45); (8) prosecuting personnel and witnesses (46-54); (9) source of information (32, 55-57).

At the end of the war, the files ended up in territory occupied by Soviet troops and were turned over to the Polish government archives in the city of Poznan (the former German Posen). There they apparently gathered dust until the early 1960s when the Polish archivist Krystyna Gorska-Golaska reviewed them and completed a brief report. The report received little attention by scholars until 1980, when Schormann went to Poland and investigated the files, which, hereafter, will be referred to by their Polish name, *Kartoteka*. A few years later the Polish government complied with the request of the Federal Republic of Germany and furnished a set of microfilms, which are now accessible in the Frankfurt branch of the Federal Archives. It was there that the data for this paper was examined.

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Limitation of the Kartoteka

Immediately after commencing examination of the *Kartoteka's* data, a number of problems became noticeable: (1) What was the unit of the collection? The individual person on trial, or the trial itself? In other words, was the collection based on *persons* or on *trials* (which might have included retrials of one and the same person)? (2) In numerous cases the Kartoteka repeated itself and recorded the same person's trial and retrial, and *each* more than once. (3) It became apparent that in addition to primary sources the SS team consulted a variety of secondary sources, thereby encountering the names of the same accused persons more than once. The result was a compounding of duplications. (4) The primary sources were not exhausted. Perusal of primary material turned up a number of court records dealing with witchcraft or sorcery cases that are missing from the *Kartoteks* and, as far as could be ascertained, have never been included in any secondary write-ups. However, most of the implicated persons in these unused documents had figured in other trials. In most cases the *Kartoteka* listed their names on the basis of it having come across them elsewhere. Hence the neglect of examining all primary documents has not caused an information gap as serious as one would initially suspect. (5) Surprisingly, the SS team failed to look into the diocesan archives, i.e., those collections of documents that are under the direct authority of the bishops. A source of prime information was left untouched -- and has remained untouched still today. (6) The *Kartoteka* reflected the difficulty of determining exact numbers of the accused, since the Inquisition occasionally tried a group of persons as a unit. For example, one case referred to *etliche junge Magdlein*, "several young girls," who were tried and burned together. The word *etliche* connotes a nuance more than "several," hence warranting a guess of between 5 and 10. (7) Another difficulty in achieving complete statistics was found in the uncertainty of the gender of the accused. For example, one case referred to "21 persons." (8) No distinction was made between sorcery and witchcraft; both offenses were included by the SS surveyers--at not fault of their own, since the courts in their actual proceedings (as distinguished from theological treatises) often failed to make a clear distinction. (9) Information about the personal background of the accused and the specifics of the trial proceedings were in most cases extremely meager. The incompletions were usually not due to neglect by the SS surveyers, but to the paucity of information in the secondary *and* primary sources. The Inquisition had no sociological survey in mind. As a result, to select Bamberg in the German province of Franconia as an example, the *Kartoteka* discloses the age of fewer than 10% of the accused, the marital status of only about 17%, and the place of residence of fewer than 20%.

In spite of these nine areas of limitations and shortcomings, the *Kartoteka* does have the potential to produce reliable statistical insights and hence make a scholarly contribution. But this potential can be brought to fruition only if the shortcomings are recognized and remedied as well as can be. In pursuit of this goal, a part of the *Kartoteka* was examined: the trials of the prince-bishopric of Bamberg. Consequently inaccuracies and duplicatons of the file were corrected. To start with, it was decided to make the *person* the statistical unit, regardless of the number of trials or retrials in which he or she

might have been involved, and to dismiss the duplications. Another source of duplications consisted of the *Kartoteka's* recording the same person under different names. Similar to other parts of Germany, in Franconia a person may be known by the written (baptismal) name as well as by their *Hausname*, an informal family name or nickname for the entire family or even clan. On the basis of cross-checking Bamberg's court cases in the *Kartoteka* it was possible to eliminate the duplications. For statistical purposes indefinite collective references, such as "several" or similar phrases were translated into numerical estimates after reexamining the sources of data. In some cases not much else could be done but to advance sociological speculation; and some questions may never be fully clarified, since many primary documents fail to give more than general or vague references as to the names of the accused or their personal characteristics.

One more point should be added. In reexamining a number of primary, hand-written court records which the SS surveyers had summarized on their questionnaires, it became evident that the paleographical skill of the team members had been impeccable. Anyone having confronted paleographical tasks knows that adequate deciphering of 16th-and-17th-centuries hands can be extremely difficult, requiring a disciplined mind and long experience. As far as it could be ascertained, there were no mistakes in the transcriptions of the texts; on the contrary, attention to detail and accuracy was obvious. While this is a plus point for the scholarship of the surveyers, their over-all performance suffered from duplications -- as if the dedication to detail impaired the ability to safeguard statistical reliability.

Despite these limitations we may assume that the following statistical summary, "purified" by eliminating duplications, presents a fair approximation of Bamberg's Renaissance witch trials. Admittedly, the margin of error would fall onto the conservative side, i.e., listing fewer rather than too many victims of the witch hunt, since not all existing primary sources have been examined and not all erstwhile primary documents have survived to our time. Nonetheless, the *Kartoteka* collection is proving useful as a stepping stone in the direction of a fuller understanding of the extent and the nature of the witch persecution. If nothing else, it provides a broad statistical basis on which we can gather a picture of the 16th-and-17th-centuries witch trials in a territory known for being one of the most notorious witch-hunting locales of all times (cf. Lamberg, 1835, Merzbacher, 1970; Sebald, 1978).

Statistical summary: The prince-bishopric of Bamberg[1]

The index of the Kartoteka, arranged by localities, lists the four trial sites of the Bamberg diocese, specifying the city of Bamberg itself with 605 cases, Zeil

[1]Due to the secularization process that started in 1802, Bamberg ceased to be prince-bishopric in 1808. After a few years' interval of vicariate administration, Bamberg became an archbishopric in 1818. I am using the name of prince-bishopric insofar as I am dealing with data from that era.

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with 611, Hallstadt with 102, and Kronach with 27. The total number of the diocese's trials listed in the *Kartoteka* thus amount to 1,345.

As best as could be determined, these trials involved at least 1010 distinct persons for the period of 1595 to 1660. Personal characteristics, or even such plain information as the exact trial year, were not available for all of them. As far as such information was available, it is presented in the following discussion and in the attached tables.

Since the prosecution in the prince-bishopric proceeded under a unified jurisdiction, the separateness of trial sites is of little importance and at the time was primarily arranged for procedural convenience; hence the following statistics, unless otherwise specified, are based on the combined figures.

In 968 cases the gender of the accused could be identified and amounted to 693 women and 275 men, i.e., the male proportions being 28% when considering all four trial sites. It is interesting, however, that in trials held in the city of Bamberg proper the male proportion increased to 34%.

In only 128 cases could the age of the accused be identified, which extended from below 10 years of age (11 individuals) to above 80 years of age (two individuals). The categories of the teens and of the 20s were represented by 21 and 20 persons, respectively. Hence the age groups up to 29 make up 41% of the accused for which we have age indications. Among them were 9 girls below age ten, a 12-year old girl, and a 15-year old boy. (See Table 1.) Marital status could be ascertained for 229 persons: 135 widowed (mostly women, but also a number of men), 75 married and 19 single. It is noteworthy that approximately 60% of the accused for which we have family-status information were persons who had lost their mates.

The exact year of the trial could be identified for 774 persons and shown to be most prevalent during the 1620s (esp. the second half), when 554 trials, or 72% of the dated trials, took place. (See Table 2.)

How do these statistics compare with the findings of studies done by other researchers in other geographic regions? The prince-bishopric shows a male proportion of the accused that is notably higher than the one found generally across Europe, which has been estimated to be ca. 20%.[2] A good part of the explanation for Bamberg's exceptionally high male proportion--being 28% for the entire bishopric and 34% for the city of Bamberg proper--may be found in the prince-bishop's power to confiscate the properties of convicted and executed witches. For example, within a single year a total of 720,000

[2]The female/male ratio of the accused fluctuated. For example, England consistently showed a low ratio, with men being accused only in about 8% of the cases; and then they usually were married to witch suspects or somehow connected with a woman who stood trial for witchcraft (Macfarlane, 1970:160). In the Geneva region the male proportion was 5% before 1600, but rose to 22% thereafter. Generally, however, the ratio stayed rather stable and the male proportion rarely deviated from 20% (cf., Monter, 1976:120). A study of northern France found a proportion of 19%. However, once accused, men risked a greater chance of death sentence than women (Muchembled, 1979:228). In sum, Bamberg's high male accusations as well as executions are exceptional.

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florins was taken from accused witches in Bamberg. Since women generally were materially disadvantaged, the persecution industry's profit increased

Table 1

Age Distribution for 128 persons standing trial for witchcraft accusation in the prince-bishopric of Bamberg, adjusted figures based on the *Kartoteka*

Trial	Trial	Age distribution									age
Site	N	-10	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+	average
Bamberg	75	11	15	7	10	6	8	7	10	1	39
Zeil	38		4	9	4	12	3	4	1	1	41
Hallstadt	6			1	2		1	1	1		48
Kronach	9		2	3	1	1		2			35
Totals		11	21	20	17	19	12	14	12	2	40

by accusing more men (details in Sebald, 1978:45-48, 164, 168).

The age distribution in the Bamberg territory, as shown in Table 1, seems to deviate from what researchers have found to be typical in other parts of Europe, where a larger proportion of the accused falls into older age brackets. However, the vulnerability of widowed persons being accused in Bamberg compares to what has been found in most other studies (cf. Muchembled, 1979:244). Also typical is the large proportion of married persons among the accused, 32%, as contrasted to 8% of single persons. For example, Midelfort's study of southwestern Germany found seven times more married women than single women among the indicted witches (1979:282).

The distribution of the years of the trials correspond to what is generally known about the witch mania in the German territories of the 17th century. The first wave hit in the second half of the 1610s and a tidal wave hit in the second half of the 1620s, spilling over into the early 1630s. After subsiding, there were relatively minor resurges in the 1650s and 60s.

The effort to determine a pattern of geographic distribution of the place of residence or origin of the accused went largely unsuccessful: Pertinent

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Table 2

Trial years for 774 persons accused of witchcraft in the prince-bishopric of Bamberg; adjusted figures based on the *Kartoteka*

Trial sites	1595-1609	1610-19	1620-29	1630-39	1640-49	1650+
Bamberg	1	10	134	37		17
Zeil	2	47	410	23		
Hallstadt		67	2			
Kronach		16	8			
Totals	3	140	554	60		17

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information was given in only approximately 15% of the trial cases. Where it was given, it usually referred to the cities of the diocese, particularly Bamberg itself, as might have been expected due to the population density. Nonetheless, the names of a number of certain hamlets recurred with notable frequencies. Topping the list were Steinbach with 42 persons standing trial, Schmachtenberg with 36, and Ziegelanger with 18. However, my perusal of original trial documents *(Malefizamt; Hist. Verein Bamberg)* showed that a number of accused persons resided in such hamlets as Weissmain and Pottenstein, which the Kartoteka fails to mention as the home communities of the accused.

The *Kartoteka's* description of the array of persons standing trial appears to reliably reflect the variegated cross-section of the population that has also been mentioned in the findings of other researchers. The Zeil data are here selected for illustration. Eighty-one out of the total 611 cases of the Zeil records inform about the occupations or the statuses of the accused and lend themselves to rough categorization into 3 classes. List 1 in the Appendix shows that the victims were not merely the lowly townsfolk or villagers, but also officials, their wives, and other persons of property and status. If we combine councillors, mayors, their wives, a bailiff's wife, the bishop's chancellor's wife, a judge, and a priest, we arrive at 19 upper-class individuals or 23% of the status-identified victims. It is remarkable that so many officials--mayors, councillors, and priests--were tried for witchcraft.

The second category, consisting of propertied but not high or official statuses, was made up of such occupations as butcher, innkeeper, cook-shop owner, blacksmith, cooper, locksmith, baker, miller, carpenter, etc. and amounted to

25, or 31%. It is difficult to speculate why so many butchers and innkeepers (five and seven, respectively) should be among the endangered occupations.

A third category, consisting of unpropertied persons of lowly jobs, such as servant, grave digger, or of children, amounted to 37, or 46%. The ambiguous reputations during the era of the witch hunt (or the Middle Ages and the Renaissance generally) of such "dishonorable" occupations as grave digging and odorous tanning and soap boiling have been described colorfully by Werner Danckert (1963); hence it comes as no surprise to find them on the Zeil list, with the tanning occupation being represented by four individuals. Equally expectable are the five servants among the accused, since such powerless persons could be used with relative impunity as scapegoats. It is also no surprise to find two midwives standing trial; according to the Inquisition (manifested in such manuals as the *Malleus maleficarum*) they belonged to a particularly suspect category.

Prima facie the distribution appears to represent an unusually high proportion of "upper-class" and propertied persons among the victims. If we combine the first and second categories, we arrive at 54% for those accused for whom a definite social status was indicated. However, these indications may lead to the unverified assumption that the prosecution industry in the Bamberg prince-bishopric favored the indictment of persons of money and property for the enrichment of the Inquisition's coffers. More adequately interpreted, these figures may mean that persons of status were recorded as such and that lower-class victims' social statuses simply went unmentioned. A more correct appraisal of the social-class distribution must figure the 44 upper-class victims as a percentage from the *total* Zeil victims, who, as mentioned earlier, have been estimated at 611. In this way we arrive at approximately between 7 and 8% representation of the propertied and upper-class persons among the victims. This percentage appears to be comparable to research findings in other parts of Europe, and again goes to show that the typical victim of the witch persecution was the powerless and poor person.

A number of cases offered some descriptive material, such as telling about the nature of the accusation, the family conditions, procedural aspects, and often illustrating the barbaric methods used by the Inquisition. List 2 shows such comments from the combined Zeil and Bamberg trials--comments providing a measure of insight into the fates of the accused.

Three observations stand out. First, it can be seen that many of the accused died in prison from torture or despair. Some of them committed suicide to escape unbearable torture. In one case, a prisoner smuggled out a letter begging his wife to send him "something" (poison) so that he may die and avoid further torture. Second, several of the accused and imprisoned made out their wills and designated the Church as the beneficiary of their estate or of a good part of it. We can only speculate about what motivated them and whether this gesture was made voluntarily.

Their willingness to surrender their estate probably was an attempt to demonstrate their loyalty to the Church and/or to avoid further torture. The irony of the story is that they were executed nonetheless -- or perhaps *because*

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of it: there cannot be a beneficiary unless someone dies. The immediate beneficiary was the prince-bishop, his coffers representing the Church, who also was responsible for disbursement of monies to pay for the expenses of the trials. Third, the record shows that the Inquisitorial procedure was most merciless when it took place in Bamberg proper. Indeed, the Bamberg Inquisitors and henchmen were notorious for excessive torture and inventing particularly heinous instruments (Hinckeldey, 1984; Merzbacher, 1970:138-152; Robbins, 1959:36-37).

An example of Bamberg's radicalism describes the fate of the city's burgomaster, Johannes Junius, imprisoned as a suspected witch. Tortured repeatedly to get a confession out of him, finally a compassionate (or an impatient?) torturer begged him to confess to something. A few days before being burned at the stake, Junius succeeded in having a letter smuggled out of the prison in which he bade a touching farewell to his daughter. Excerpts from the lengthy letter illustrate the typical situation of Inquistiorial procedure in the Bamberg jurisdiction:

July 24, 1628

Many thousand good-nights, dearly beloved daughter Veronica.

Innocent have I come into prison, innocent have I been tortured, innocent must I die. For whoever comes into the witch prison must become a witch or be tortured until he invents something out of his head and--God pity him--bethinks him of something.

I will tell you how it has gone with me.

..And then came also--God in highest heaven have mercy--the executioner, and put the thumbscrews on me, both hands bound together, so that the blood spurted from the nails and everywhere, so that for four weeks I could not use my hands, as you can see from my writing.

Thereafter they stripped me, bound my hands behind me, and drew me up on the ladder. Then I though heaven and earth were at an end. Eight times did they draw me up and let me fall again, so that I suffered terrible agonies.

And this happened on Friday, June 30th, and with God's help I had to bear the torture. When at last the executioner led me back to the cell, he said to me: "Sir, I beg you, for God's sake, confess something, whether it be true or not. Invent something, for you cannot endure the torture which you will be put to; and, even if you bear it all, yet you will not escape, not even if you were an earl, but one torture will follow another until you say you are a witch. Not before that will they let you go, as you may see by all their trials, for one is just as another."

.. And so I made my confession, as follows, but it was all a lie. [Here Junius recites his confession very much as it appears in the offical trial minutes.]

Dear child keep this letter secret, so that people will not find it, else I shall be tortured most piteously and the jailers will be beheaded. So strictly is it forbidden... Dear child, pay this man a thaler.. I have taken several days to write this--my hands are both crippled. I am in a sad plight.

Good night, for your father Johannes Junius will never see you more.
(Robbins, 1959, pp.292-93.)

Bamberg's barbarism was mainly due to the fanaticism of Prince-Bishop Johann Georg II Fuchs von Dornheim, remembered as the Hexenbischof,

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who ruled from 1623 to 1633 and reportedly burned ca. 600 witches during that time (Lamberg, 1835; Leitschuh, 1883; Looshorn, 1906). Among his accomplishments was the building of a special witch prison with an elaborate torture chamber in the valley below his princely palace. It went into operation in 1627, and due to this facility most trials thereafter were moved from outlying places to Bamberg.

Implications and summary

Besides serving as the basis of a purely statistical evaluation, the *Kartoteka* can also serve a qualitative function: Its inventory of diverse trial cases can stimulate the selection of specific research projects. In other words, it can serve as a show window displaying wares from which a researcher can choose. The researcher benefits from a certain amount of footwork that has already been completed for him or her, especially insofar as the *Kartoteka* identifies the sources instrumental for further and fuller analysis. As any researcher knows, such preparation saves time and effort and sometimes means the battle half won. (A current project tries to take advantage of the *Kartoteka's* potential as guide to investigate the case of a Catholic priest arrested in 1627 on charges of witchcraft.)

In summary, the Kartoteka is the material outcome of Himmler's doleful ideological assumption that the Inquisition was in the business of annihilating the last remnants of a Celto-Germanic religious community. While the methodology of Himmler's survey team was superficial and resulted in inaccuracies, esp, in listing duplications of persons standing trial, cross-examination and double-checking of data pertaining to the prince-bishopric of Bamberg helped to produce a statistical estimate of the number and type of persons tried as witches in that locale.

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Appendix

List 1

Occupations or other personal identifications
Cof 81 persons tried for witchcraft at Zeil,
according to the *Kartoteka*

(1)*Official and/or propertied persons* Total: 19 = 23%

town mayors (2)
town mayors' wives (2)
town councillors (8)
town councillor's wife
a councillor who is also a merchant
The bailiff woman from Lichtenfels
village mayor's wife
the bishop's chancellor's wife
Catholic priest
city magistrate

(2)*Propertied but no official persons* Total 25 =31%

female innkeepers (or wives of innkeepers) (5)
male innkeepers (2)
butchers (5)
female cobbler (or wife of cobbler)
wine merchant
cook-shop owner, female (or wife of owner)
wine merchant, female (or wife of merchant)
blacksmith
cooper
locksmith
taylor
miller
miller's wife
carpenter

(3)*Unpropertied persons and childern* Total: 37 = 46%

gardener woman
straw cutter woman
tanner women (3)
tanner man
a physician's daughter from Nuremberg
locksmith's daughter
carpenter's daughter
maid servants(5)
midwives (2)
a little boy from Schesslitz
"5 poor sinners"
a girl
a kitchen mistress
the youngest daughter of Hauswein
the older daughter of Hauswein
the other daughter of Hauswein
the old soap-boiler woman
town piper
grave digger
fisherwoman
cloth cutter women
the female "medic/healer"
shepherdess
seamstress
candlemaker, male

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List 2

Characterizing comments
concerning witch trials at Zeil and Bamberg, according to the
Kartoteka

Confession of maleficia: hexing animals and humans, responsible for the death of several people.

15-year old boy, self-indictment.

Died in prison and burned.

Died in prison on account of "great pain" and burned on Sept. 17th, 1617.

Execution by sword and fire.

Decapitated and burned.

Burned alive (indicated in a majority of cases).

Sentence: Death by fire; mercy commutation to decapitation before burning.

A "Female person" executed together with stepfather.

A young girl who came to the Inquisition and self-indicted.

2 single girls denounced by Margaret Frank as the initiators of witchcraft.

Made out their wills and designated the Church as the beneficiary of a considerable portion of their holdings/finances. Innkeeper and wife of the "Rebstock."

Number of surviving children: "6 little ones;" mother is the innkeeper's wife of the "Rebstock." Innkeeper's estate is 2,440 florins, debts 916 florins, balance 1,524 florins.

19-year old girl. Sentence: to be burned alive after tearing her breasts with incandescent pliers. Father had been burned as a witch 8 years prior. Mother had been arrested, imprisoned, and discharged 8 years prior.

At the time of her arrest it was discovered that the midwife had among her paraphernalia a necklace of corals which she allegedly used (magically) to stop hemorrhaging at childbirth.

60-year old woman tortured: within four days (from May 16 to 19, 1618) thumb-screws, the boot, strappado, stones, whipped, "Bamberger Bock."

A widowed woman: tortured, confessed, designated the Church as the beneficiary of most of her estate, and then died in prison.

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45-year old town councillor: tortured with thumb-screws, the boot, strappado, "Bamberger Bock," burned with sulphur. In his will he designated the Church as the benefi ciary of his estate. Executed.

Accusation: desecration of the Holy Host. Sentence: death by fire.

70-year old man tortured: thumb-screws, the boot, whipped, strappado, stone, put on the wheel, strappado, whipped.

A mother, imprisoned and tortured, lets it be known that she would gladly die as long as her little children would be taken care of.

Died in prison. (A frequent reference.)

One trial involved 6 persons, among them the daughter of the chancellor of the city of Aichstadt. Conviction: Witchcraft. Execution: October 6, 1928.*

A 13-year old boy accused to be in cahoots with the devil.*

A convicted witch was the wife of a cripple.*

Died in prison after undergoing torture.*

A convicted witch's sentence: Tearing her breasts with incandescent pliers, hacking of a hand, then burned alive. Oct. 12, 1929.*

A little girl from Hollfeld; arrested August 24, 1629; accusation: witchcraft imprisoned and tortured over a period of one year and 8 months.*

A "female" tortured by being dipped into boiling lime water and so leading to her heath. 1630.*

An old peasant, tortured and executed.*

The widower Philip Deckhler, father of 5 little children, "who (the children) perished while he was imprisoned." Executed.1631.*

A boy, Hans Dictelmann; self-indicted; was to be turned over to the Jesuits for "examination." 1619.*

A woman in the witch prison -- tortured to death.*

Executed: Simon Krautblatt, born in Hollfeld, "who had more debts than he was worth." 1628.*

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* Trial site was Bamberg Proper.

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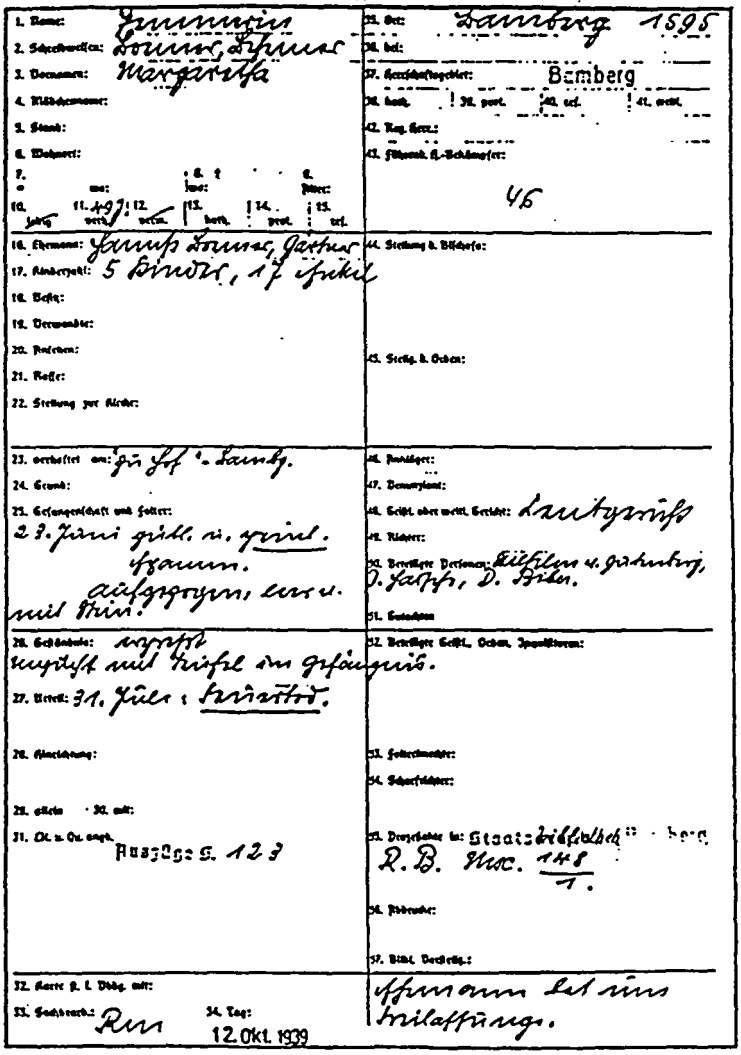
Figure 1

Example of a Kartoteka questionnaire[3]



[3] This example of the commando's questionnaire refers to a 1595 Bamberg case and pertains to a Margaretha Boemer, a 49-year-old married woman with 5 children and 17 grandchildren. Her husband a gardner, begged, apparently without avail, to have her set free. The inquisition included torture by strappado (with additional weight). She "confessed" sexual relations with the devil while in prison, and was sentenced to be burned at the stake. The inquisition was begun on June 23rd, sentence was pronounced on July 31st. (SS surveyer: Rm. Date of completion: October 12, 1939.)

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